

The Food Standards Agency responds to government gene editing plans

The Food Standards Agency will continue to listen to, inform and advise consumers on food safety and standards – as the [government sets out its plans for the future of gene editing in England](#).

On Wednesday 29th September 2021, Environment Secretary George Eustice announced a review of the regulatory definition of a genetically modified organism (GMO). This excludes organisms produced by gene editing (GE) and other genetic technologies if they could have been developed by traditional breeding.

This move, which follows a public consultation earlier this year, could see a change to regulation of GE. This could streamline innovative applications which are deemed to have environmental, economic and nutritional benefits.

FSA Explains

[Genome editing](#), also referred to as gene editing, is the term given to a wide range of techniques used to alter the DNA of organisms, including plants and animals.

It works by using enzymes to cut DNA at specific points. This method can be used to add, delete or replace sections of DNA.

Changes introduced by genome editing can be identical to those occurring naturally or achieved through traditional breeding, but can be made more quickly and precisely.

The FSA recognises that there are significant benefits to changing the way we regulate genetic technologies, to make sure the system is as up to date as possible and properly takes into account new technologies and scientific discoveries.

Professor Robin May, FSA Chief Scientific Adviser, said:

“Our role moving forwards will be to work closely with colleagues in Defra and other key stakeholders both inside and outside of government, to ensure that the way we regulate genetic technologies is appropriate and robust, and crucially meets our objectives of prioritising food safety and protecting consumers.

“We always seek to listen to, inform and advise members of the public when it comes to food, and we take this responsibility very seriously. We know from carrying out recent consumer research into GE that the public have low awareness of this technology. We will continue to work hard to provide clear and transparent information so consumers can rest assured that the FSA is working hard to protect their plates and their interests.

“Finally, we support giving consumers choice. We recognise the potential benefits of GE methods, and understand the Government’s desire to unlock innovation and take advantage of opportunities for greater productivity and environmental sustainability in

the food chain. However, GE or GM foods will only be permitted if they are judged to be safe to eat, not mislead consumers, and not have less nutritional value than similar products that are already on the market.”

There are currently no GE foods on the market in the UK.

Recently published FSA research into [consumer views of GE foods](#), and [international regulatory approaches to GM and novel foods](#), as well as the results of a [‘Genome Editing and the Future of Food’ expert horizon scanning workshop](#), are all available on our website.

Consumers can also find out more about GE technologies and watch an ‘FSA Explains’ video on our [dedicated GE webpage](#).